

Sylvilagus transitionalis* (New England Cottontail)*Priority 1 Species of Greatest Conservation Need (SGCN)****Class:** *Mammalia* (Mammals)**Order:** *Lagomorpha* (Rabbits, Hares, And Pikas)**Family:** *Leporidae* (Hares And Rabbits)**General comments:**

Low and declining numbers due to ongoing habitat loss and fragmentation.

Species Conservation Range Maps for New England Cottontail:Town Map: [Sylvilagus transitionalis_Towns.pdf](#)Subwatershed Map: [Sylvilagus transitionalis_HUC12.pdf](#)**SGCN Priority Ranking - Designation Criteria:****Risk of Extirpation:**Maine Status: **Endangered**Federal Status: **Candidate**IUCN Red List Status: **Vulnerable****State Special Concern or NMFS Species of Concern: NA****Recent Significant Declines:**

New England Cottontail is currently undergoing steep population declines, which has already led to, or if unchecked is likely to lead to, local extinction and/or range contraction.

Regional Endemic:*Sylvilagus transitionalis's* global geographic range is at least 90% contained within the area defined by USFWS Region 5, the Canadian Maritime Provinces, and southeastern Quebec (south of the St. Lawrence River).**High Regional Conservation Priority:****Northeast Endangered Species and Wildlife Diversity Technical Committee:**

Risk: Yes, Data: Yes, Area: Yes, Spec: Yes, Warrant Listing: Yes, Total Categories with "Yes": 5

Northeast Regional Synthesis (RSGCN):

Responsibility: High, Concern: Very High

High Climate Change Vulnerability: NA**Understudied rare taxa: NA****Historical: NA****Culturally Significant: NA****Habitats Assigned to New England Cottontail:****Formation Name Freshwater Marsh****Macrogroup Name Wet Meadow-Shrub Marsh****Habitat System Name:** Laurentian-Acadian Wet Meadow-Shrub Swamp ****Primary Habitat**** **Notes:** cottontails will use the shrubby edges of these meadows**Formation Name Grassland & Shrubland****Macrogroup Name Ruderal Shrubland & Grassland****Habitat System Name:** Introduced Shrubland ****Primary Habitat******Habitat System Name:** Powerline Right-of-Way**Habitat System Name:** Ruderal Upland - Old Field ****Primary Habitat**** **Notes:** These fields may be used for summer feeding if associated with a brushy edge

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Stressor Priority Level based on Severity and Actionability		Moderate Severity	High Severity
	Highly Actionable	Medium-High	High
	Moderately Actionable	Medium	Medium-High
	Actionable with Difficulty	Low	Low

IUCN Level 1 Threat **Natural Systems Modifications****IUCN Level 2 Threat:** **Other Ecosystem Modifications****Severity:** Severe**Actionability:** Highly actionable**Notes:** Only 3% of southern Maine currently exists in early regenerating forests. Landowners need to be convinced that it is OK to cut down trees and that shrubby habitat has value for a number of wildlife species.**IUCN Level 1 Threat** **Invasive and Other Problematic Species, Genes and Diseases****IUCN Level 2 Threat:** **Problematic Native Species-Diseases****Severity:** Moderate Severity**Actionability:** Moderately actionable**Notes:** High white-tailed deer densities have substantial effect on forest ecosystems. High browsing levels by deer can affect understory stem densities, forest structure, and select against plants that are preferred foods for herbivores. High densities of white-tailed deer were considered one of the factors threatening the habitat needed by New England cottontail in the Rangewide Conservation Strategy (p. 20)
http://www.newenglandcottontail.org/sites/default/files/conservation_strategy_final_12-3-12.pdf.**IUCN Level 1 Threat** **Residential and Commercial Development****IUCN Level 2 Threat:** **Commercial and Industrial Areas****Severity:** Moderate Severity**Actionability:** Moderately actionable**Notes:** NEC can exist in industrial areas if shrub habitat is maintained. However, management of this land is seldom coordinated or done intentionally to benefit NEC. Currently, industrial development is occurring in prime NEC areas and may lead to further loss of habitat.**IUCN Level 2 Threat:** **Tourism and Recreational Areas****Severity:** Moderate Severity**Actionability:** Moderately actionable**Notes:** Much of the prime NEC habitat occurs along coastal Maine, which is prime land for recreation and resorts. NEC habitat can be incorporated into these areas, and managed, as we have done in state parks. However, this will take a continuous effort to recruit landowners into NEC management agreements in these areas.**IUCN Level 1 Threat** **Transportation and Service Corridors****IUCN Level 2 Threat:** **Roads and Railroads****Severity:** Moderate Severity**Actionability:** Moderately actionable**Notes:** Busy highways such as I-95 can be a barrier to dispersal; however, rabbits can use brushy habitat along the sides of roads for dispersal. Removing all brushy cover from roads is bad for rabbits.

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Conservation Action	Category: Habitat Management	Biological Priority: critical	Type: on-going
Restore early successional habitat in southern Maine following guidance in the New England Cottontail Conservation Strategy			

Stressor(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

Other Ecosystem Modifications

Conservation Action	Category: Public Outreach	Biological Priority: high	Type: on-going
Improve public perception of the value of early successional habitat following guidance in the New England Cottontail Conservation Strategy			

Stressor(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

Other Ecosystem Modifications

Conservation Action	Category: Species Management	Biological Priority: high	Type: on-going
Conduct a captive breeding program following guidance in the New England Cottontail Conservation Strategy			

Stressor(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

Other Ecosystem Modifications

Conservation Action	Category: Survey and Monitoring	Biological Priority: high	Type: new
Conduct active restoration of early-successional brushy habitat on both private and public lands in southern Maine, and monitor the success of habitat restoration using methodologies identified in the Rangewide Conservation Strategy			

Stressor(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

Other Ecosystem Modifications

Conservation Action	Category: Survey and Monitoring	Biological Priority: high	Type: new
Monitor released individuals from the captive breeding program using radio telemetry to determine survival and use of landscape. Alternatively, populations may be monitored using mark-recapture techniques that rely on genotype			

Stressor(s) Addressed By This Conservation Action

Other Ecosystem Modifications

Guild Level Conservation Actions:

This Species is currently not attributed to a guild.

Broad Taxonomic Group Conservation Actions:

Additional relevant conservation actions for this species are assigned within broader taxonomic groups in Maine's 2015 Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4, Table 4-1.

Habitat Based Conservation Actions:

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Additional conservation actions that may benefit habitat(s) associated with this species can be found in Maine's 2015 Wildlife Action Plan: Element 4, Table 4-15. Click on the Habitat Grouping of interest to launch a habitat based report summarizing relevant conservation actions and associated SGCN.

The Wildlife Action Plan was developed through a lengthy participatory process with state agencies, targeted conservation partners, and the general public. The Plan is non-regulatory. The species, stressors, and voluntary conservation actions identified in the Plan complement, but do not replace, existing work programs and priorities by state agencies and partners.